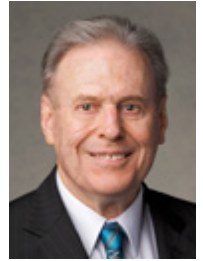




# The Essential Role of Revelation

*Revelation is an essential factor in knowing the things of God.  
They cannot be learned solely by study and reason.*



**By Elder  
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Of the Presidency  
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**T**he Lord’s admonition to us with respect to learning is clear. He tells us, “And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118).

The Lord is saying that both knowledge and wisdom are necessary. As stated simply in the words of this proverb from Guinea, West Africa: “Knowledge without wisdom is like water in the sand.”

A more complete explanation of the importance of both knowledge and wisdom is given in the words of Jacob, son of Lehi:

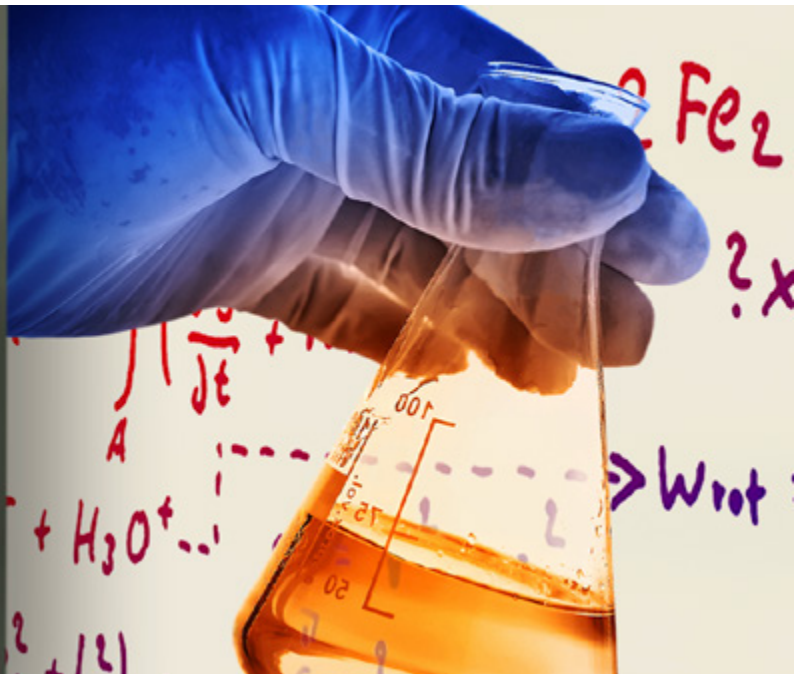
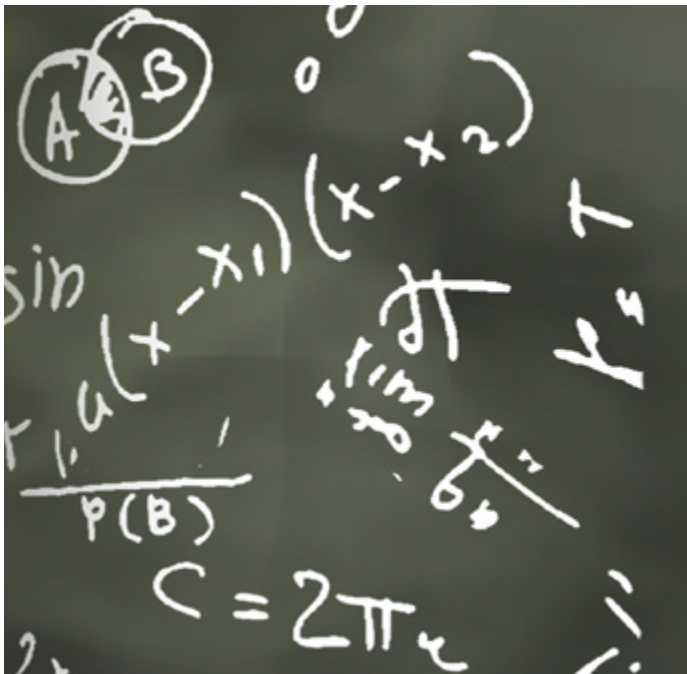
“O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

“But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:28–29).

Here, we have a hint at how to find wisdom: we must hearken to the counsels of God. As the Lord has said concerning those who put their trust in Him:

“Their wisdom shall be great, and their understanding reach to heaven; and before them the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall come to naught.

“For by my Spirit will I enlighten them, and by my power will I make known unto them the secrets of my will—yea, even those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor yet entered into the heart of man” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:9–10).



But most people do not understand this or do not live it; for them, education is purely an intellectual pursuit. We are easily indoctrinated in modern society to believe that we can really only know something through our intellects and our physical senses. There is no tolerance in the modern world for things that can't be proven scientifically.

Nobel Prize–winning Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn expressed the idea that the problems of the Western world began in the Renaissance. He indicated that the thought processes enshrined during the Renaissance “did not [see in] the existence of . . . man . . . any higher task than the attainment of happiness on earth. . . . Modern Western civilization [has developed] on the dangerous trend to worship man and his material needs. . . .

“ . . . We have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life.”<sup>1</sup>

### Two Ways to Know

Latter-day Saints understand that there are, instead, two different ways of knowing things: scientifically (through the use of reasoning and the physical senses) and spiritually (through revelation and the spiritual senses). The experiences that my wonderful wife, Kay, and I have been blessed to enjoy in West Africa have reinforced for us the power of knowing spiritually. Many West Africans

dream dreams or see visions that have spiritual implications for them and for their families.

Like others, I have not always clearly understood what it means to know spiritually. As a young man, I met a beautiful young lady who was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I had never before heard of this church. Having grown up in a different Christian church, I felt that to accept the teachings of the restored Church, I needed to be totally convinced intellectually that my previous beliefs were mistaken and that these new teachings were truly teachings of the gospel that Jesus Christ had previously established.

Several consecutive sets of missionaries taught me, but I always had questions for them. When they could not answer my questions, they would go away and then return the following week with the answers. By then I had more questions. This continued for several weeks as I tried to receive an intellectual conversion.

Then, one day as I sat in a church meeting, I felt clearly this message from the Holy Ghost: “Terry, all of your questions have answers. It is not important for you to know them all now. As the questions come to you, they will be answered. But I need you to act and to be baptized now.”

Do you see what had happened? My study and pondering gave rise to revelation. I immediately acted and was baptized. Over the subsequent 44 years, the prophecy





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contained in that revelation has been fulfilled. All of my questions have been answered, including those I had not even considered 44 years ago.

President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has spoken about the different ways of knowing:

“What do we mean when we testify and say that we *know* the gospel is true? Contrast that kind of knowledge with ‘I know it is cold outside’ or ‘I know I love my wife.’ These are three different kinds of knowledge, each learned in a different way. Knowledge of outside temperature can be verified by scientific proof. Knowledge that we love our spouse is personal and subjective. While not capable of scientific proof, it is still important. The idea that all important knowledge is based on scientific evidence is simply untrue.

“While there are some ‘evidences’ for gospel truths (for example, see Psalm 19:1; Helaman 8:24), scientific methods will not yield spiritual knowledge. This is what Jesus taught in response to Simon Peter’s testimony that He was the Christ: ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and

blood”—or, we might say, logic or the physical senses—“hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven’ (Matthew 16:17). The Apostle Paul explained this. In a letter to the Corinthian Saints, he said, ‘The things of God knoweth no man, but [by] the Spirit of God’ (1 Corinthians 2:11; see also John 14:17).

“In contrast, we know the things of man by the ways of man, but ‘the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned’ (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“The Book of Mormon teaches that God will manifest the truth of spiritual things unto us by the power of the Holy Ghost (see Moroni 10:4–5). In modern revelation God promises us that we will receive ‘knowledge’ by His telling us in our mind and in our heart ‘by the Holy Ghost’ (D&C 8:1–2).”<sup>2</sup>

This is revelation.

### **The Witness of the Holy Ghost**

President Oaks continued:

“One of the greatest things about our Heavenly Father’s plan for His children is that each of us can know the truth of that plan for ourselves. That revealed knowledge does not come from books, from scientific proof, or from intellectual pondering. As with the Apostle Peter, we can receive that



knowledge directly from our Heavenly Father through the witness of the Holy Ghost.

“When we know spiritual truths by spiritual means, we can be just as sure of that knowledge as scholars and scientists are of the different kinds of knowledge they have acquired by [scientific] methods.”<sup>3</sup>

Although spiritual knowledge and intellectual knowledge are different, both are important. To comprehend the things of the world, we must be intellectually enlightened; to know and understand the things of God, we must be spiritually enlightened.

Revelation is an essential factor in knowing the things of God. The things of God cannot be learned solely by study and reason.

Note also that study and reason precede revelation, and the intellect will confirm the revelation. But it’s not the intellectual confirmation that’s most important; it’s the revealed truth and our acting on it. We learn through study and faith (see Doctrine and Covenants 9:7–9; 88:118).

Some things of this world are unseen, as indicated by the Apostle Paul: “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

As we think about this, it makes perfect sense in a plan

of salvation that is completely just and fair. You have all been in high school or college classes with people of greater or lesser intellect than yourself. A good portion of our intelligence is due to genetics. How fair would it be if God favored people of greater intellect over those with lesser ability by making the acceptance of gospel truths a function of our intellects? Why would He give some an advantage based on inherited intellect?

He would not, and He does not! Rather, we learn spiritual truths as a function of our spiritual receptivity. Such is a spiritual gift, nurtured by individual faith, prayer, humility, and goodness, as well as a desire to respond and to act.

Despite the apparent conflict between reason and revelation, the rational view and the religious view of the world are not opposites of one another. The religious view (at least the view of a religion that is undiluted by apostasy) includes reason as well as revelation, and it embraces the truths determined by both. In contrast, the rational view excludes what is spiritually revealed.

### **Have Faith, Seek, and Teach**

Let’s examine in greater detail Doctrine and Covenants section 88:118: “And as *all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another* words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best



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books words of *wisdom*; seek *learning*, even *by study* and also *by faith*” (emphasis added).

The teachings of this verse are critical.

First, the Lord tells us that a basic human problem is a lack of faith.

Second, He says that we must seek diligently, not superficially.

Third, we “teach one another.” This is an exercise in mutual help and mutual growth, one individual to another (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:106).

Our focus should not just be on acquiring *knowledge* but also on acquiring *wisdom*—the practical application of knowledge for purposes of good.

Finally, these things are acquired through both study and faith, with *faith* being a word that encompasses our acting on what we believe in order to gain knowledge and wisdom.

Clearly, we have a responsibility to know by both reason and revelation, with revelation being an essential component for spiritual knowledge and wisdom. That skill is exemplified by our prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. I assure you that he is a man of both the highest intellect and the highest faith who depends on revelation and who receives it in absolute abundance. The consequence of this is his powerful relationship with the Savior, and just as powerful a relationship with others. When you associate with President Nelson, you can both see and feel his love, just as we will all one day see and feel the love of our Savior as we stand before Him. Then we will be overcome by His undying and incomprehensible love for us individually.

I have learned this truth through reason and through revelation. The more powerful of these two in knowing this and other spiritual realities has been the latter: revelation. My witness is born of the myriad spiritual experiences I have been blessed to see, feel, and receive. ■

*From a devotional address, “How Can We Know—By Reason or by Revelation?” given at Brigham Young University—Idaho on September 25, 2018. For the full address, visit [web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches](http://web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches).*

#### NOTES

1. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, “The Exhausted West,” *Harvard Magazine*, July–Aug. 1978, 25, 26, [harvardmagazine.com](http://harvardmagazine.com).
2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Testimony,” *Ensign*, May 2008, 26.
3. Dallin H. Oaks, “Testimony,” 26.